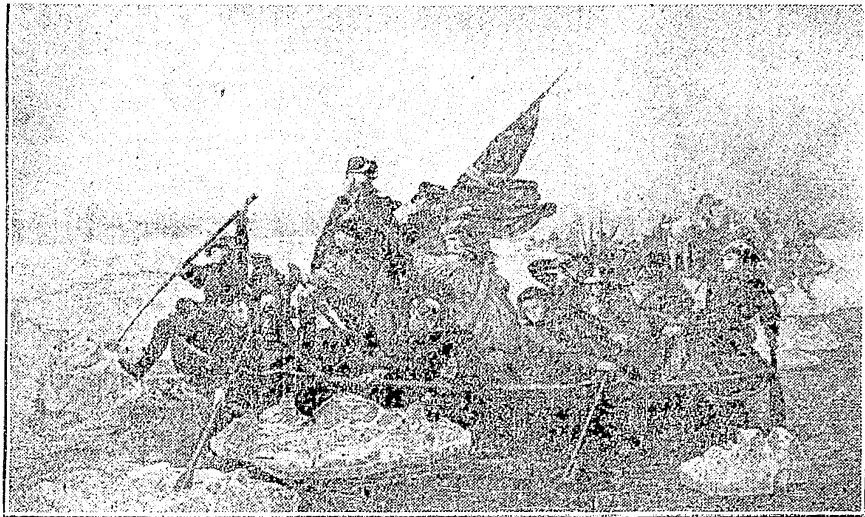


WHEN EXTON GUARD CROSSED ICY DELAWARE AND MARCHED EIGHT MILES TO TRENTON JUST LIKE GENERAL WASHINGTON'S MEN



LUETZE'S PAINTING OF WASHINGTON CROSSING THE DELAWARE

Trentonians past middle life never see Christmas approach without having recalled to their minds the sham battles with which December 26 used to be signalized. There will be no observance of the defeat of the Hessians next Wednesday. It is doubtful if ever again a military celebration of that sort will take place. Since we have become involved in the frightful destruction of life across the Atlantic, we Americans have less taste for the awful din of war, mimic or actual, which we possessed when it was a gentleman's game waged according to civilized rules. There are other reasons also, as will appear below, which have relegated the sham battle to the discard as a method of popular entertainment.

Still in their day those annual tournaments which were dealt out to the hireling Hessian, enjoyed a large amount of popular favor. They were not entirely of the carnival order, however. The celebration of December 26, 1876, was considered a splendid success. It had been prepared for during many weeks, men like John Taylor, Charles Carr, William H. Skirm, "Staff" Little, Ferdinand W. Roebing and John Exton served on the committee of arrangements; the National Guard helped to give eclat to the spectacle and Captain Samuel M. Youmans personating Colonel Hall, was "mortally wounded" at the proper moment, but despite all this, there was one incident that left only painful memories to all who participated in it. And it had been intended to be the most spectacular feature of the day's program. Let one of the survivors spin the yarn.

IMITATING THE CONTINENTALS.

"Company D, Exton Guards, (the Guards representing the Continentals) thought it would give realism to the celebration at the 100th anniversary of the battle if an exact repetition of Washington's crossing the Delaware and the famous march to Trenton were enacted. Captain Aaron Lovett worked up the enthusiasm of the company and drilled them nightly in their quarters, later taken over by the Jack Stokes Yacht Club. It was a very cold December, about like the weather of this year—snow, ice and near-zero temperature. There was an abundance of sleighing and on December 15, the Delaware was frozen solid. This was almost too much, but by Christmas the river had broken up and was full of ice. Well, when Christmas day came, we went to the arsenal and borrowed overcoats, blankets, knapsacks, canteens, cartridge boxes, etc., and, fully equipped, marched around town a large part of the day, proud of the feat we were going to perform. As the shades of night began to fall, we took the train cheerily over the Belvidere road, 100

strong, and headed by Jake Booz and Elias Phillips with life and drum, reached Taylorsville, where we entertained the village and where we ourselves were entertained most heartily. Late in the evening we were quartered in an old wheelwright shop, and about 2 a. m. we were aroused and started for the frozen Delaware. The night was extremely cold, but we had had sandwiches and hot coffee and under the leadership of John G. Muirheid, we were piloted across the river in safety, though not without some thrills as we beat against the floating ice. In this particular, the real Continentals had nothing on us."

COLD, DISMAL MARCH.

"But the worst was yet to come. We didn't divide our troops as Washington divided his, but we hung together on the river road. It certainly was a weary march. The way the wind blew off the river, I thought I'd freeze and I knew everybody else was in the same boat. Part of the time we ran and then we walked. We had no difficulty in realizing what heroes our forefathers were when they made this trip, unprotected by heavy clothes and good shoes such as we had. Do you recall these lines from Henry K. Howe's spirited poem: "The struggling horses and staggering men

Press on the march with toil and pain,

Staining the snow with bloody feet,

Battling the blast, the cold and sleet."

"Unlike those patriots of 1776, we were comforted with the thought, when we got as far as the Yardley bridge, that at Cadwalader woods hot coffee and lunch were to be ready for us and blazing bonfires to take the chill out of our bones.

BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

"But alas, when we reached the outskirts of Trenton, there was no sign of bonfires, no lunch, no coffee, not a soul in sight. A misunderstanding of orders was the cause and footsores and chilled to the marrow; we continued our march into town. If there were any heroes among us, I failed to notice them at this stage of the game. As we approached the State House, about 6 a. m., we felt that at last we were sure of shelter and warmth. But what do you think?

"The night janitor closed the door in our faces. He said he had no authority to open up the Capital at that hour and besides who was going to clean up after we had camped in the corridors? I don't know what might have happened to Mrs. Menley, the day janitress, had not arrived just about this time and accepted all the responsibility for taking us in doors. We needed no pressing invitation, but throwing off our knapsacks and spreading our blankets on

the hard marble floor, we were soon enjoying a badly-needed rest.

"Meanwhile, Captain Lovett went down town and had hot breakfast sent to the State House. After a couple of hours' sleep, followed by refreshments, the hardy men forgot the night's adventure and were ready to participate in the sham battle which was waged for a couple of hours with a booming of cannon, gun firing by the infantry and no end of inspiring music by several bands. The Hessians were chased about town and finally surrounded and forced to surrender near Taylor Opera House.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" our gallant soldiers shout, "The foeman falter, flee—it is a rout, a rout!"

"In the engagement General W. S. Truex, of Civil War fame, personated General Washington; General E. L. Campbell was General Greene at the head of one division of the Continentals and Martin Keegan was General Sullivan of the other division. Captain E. C. Stahl as General Knox commanded the artillery, which, from the head of town, rained destruction on the Hessians. There were really two surrenders. While one section of the enemy laid down their arms on Broad Street, another section, under Captain Peter Wilkes, was forced at the point of the bayonet to give way to the Continentals commanded by Captain Theodore James in front of the Post Office."

The victory was celebrated with the firing of 100 guns in the rear of the State House and the ringing of bells at the churches and fire houses. A collation was served at Washington Hall, where Sarah Smith Stafford was a guest of honor. Later in the day, Taylor Opera House was filled with patriots, who listened to an appropriate address by Judge James Buchanan.

OBSERVANCE CENSURED.

Such, in brief, was the nature of the Centennial anniversary with its lights and its shadows. A serious subject of criticism that year, as well as on other occasions of the kind, was that there was too much conviviality. Doubtless the exposure to cold weather incident to an outdoor observance in midwinter, led to excessive use of alcohol, with the unpleasant results likely to follow. Not content with one day's indulgence, some of the participants carried the spree over several days. It was because of such unseemly conduct that the following severe lines were printed from a correspondent in the True American a day or two after the Sham Battle of 1876:

"The grand Centennial sham fight is over. Thank God for so much, and may it be another hundred years before Trenton will have another!"

The writer went on to say that these affairs were a perfect waste of time and money and suggested that it would be far better for people of means who supported the festivity, to spend the money for food and clothes and warmth for the poor. Attention was further called to the presentation of the Mercer Grand Jury in January, 1845, styling the annual sham battle as a "great and increasing evil." The valor of pursuing nimble fugitives through the streets, he jury went on to say, may well be questioned, while the annoyance and danger to quiet citizens and strangers is undoubted and the unexampled drunkenness and rioting of the last occasion (1844) is a melancholy fact and a solemn warning. Those who want to celebrate were urged by the jury to do so by making an actual midnight crossing of the Delaware and a march afoot to Trenton.

Company D, Exton Guards, is one body that never could be persuaded to attempt a second celebration of this latter character.